

## Item #1- Motorized and Non-motorized Use Levels

**Evaluation Objectives:** To evaluate motorized and non-motorized recreation use levels to determine if a full range of quality recreation opportunity experiences are being provided.

**Methods:** Evaluation of recreation use data gathered from the following sources: skier visits, National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM), campground use data, Recreation Facility Analysis master planning, University of Montana Region 1 Needs Assessment for Outfitter and Guides and trails information.

### **Results and Evaluation:**

The forest-wide resource goals outlined in the Forest Plan provide for a range of quality outdoor opportunities within a forest environment that can be developed for visitor use and satisfaction and provide a range of quality recreation opportunities, including motorized and non-motorized, in an undeveloped forest environment.

About 46% of the Flathead National Forest is part of the National Wilderness Preservation System: The Bob Marshall, Great Bear, and Mission Mountains Wildernesses. Roads, timber harvest, and motorized travel are not permitted in these areas. Other designated special management areas are the Flathead Wild and Scenic River, Jewel Basin Hiking Area, and Coram Experimental Forest. The remaining 1.3 million non-wilderness acres may have roads and may be open to timber harvest, and recreation based motorized travel.

The forest offers a wide spectrum of recreation opportunities: to evaluate if we are providing a full-range of motorized and non-motorized recreation use levels and quality recreation opportunity experiences, we reviewed a variety of activities.

### **National Visitor Use Monitoring:**

The National Visitor Use Monitoring Program (NVUM) includes visitor use surveys completed on a 5 year cycle. The program provides information about recreation visitors to national forest system managed lands at the national, regional and forest levels. User surveys were conducted in 2001 and 2005 on the Flathead National Forest measuring trends in user satisfaction and use levels. This information will be collected on the Flathead again in 2010.

**Table 1-1.** Total Estimated Site Visits to the Flathead National Forest

Visit Type	Calendar Yr 2000	Fiscal Yr 2005 10/2004 – 9/2005
Total Estimated Site Visits	1,287,770	1,184,600

*Revised results National Visitor Use Monitoring Program data February 5, 2009*

Variations in NVUM figures can be partially explained by the NVUM process changing between FY 2000 and FY2005. The current data sets of NVUM numbers cannot be used to display a trend because 1) the second round of surveys for the Region (Montana and northern Idaho) is not yet complete and 2) there are differences in round 1 and round 2 survey protocols. A comparison between rounds of the two data sets are therefore not feasible and it appears that several cycles of NVUM data will be needed to get a good idea on use trends. In reviewing the information from the monitoring survey, the data gives a forest wide picture and does not reflect each individual ranger districts patterns of use. It is difficult to measure the amount of use the forest receives and evaluate the full range of opportunities provided on the forest.

In 2005, approximately 66.6% of Flathead Forest visitors traveled 0-50 miles to the site they visited, 6.4 % traveled 50 – 100 miles, 4.7% traveled 100- 200 miles , 4.7% traveled 200-500 miles with 17.5 percent traveling over 500 miles.

The NVUM data shows a drop in recreation use; several factors including wildfires and low snow years (2003 and 2004, respectively) have likely contributed to reduced visitor numbers collected in the survey of use on the Flathead National Forest. Flathead County's population is growing each year with new permanent and part-time residents; this growth should continue to contribute to increases in forest visitor use. Recreation use in 2006 in nearby Glacier National Park had some of the highest use levels on record; high use levels at Glacier NP typically mean higher visitor use on the Flathead National Forest.

Wilderness ranger and river rangers report trailheads to the easily accessible Jewel Basin Hiking Area and Mission Mountain Wilderness and sites that access the Middle Fork and North Forks of the Flathead River are full on most summer weekends.

### **Winter Recreation**

There are two large winter sports resorts on the Flathead National Forest under special use permits. These areas contribute a large portion of the recreation use on the forest.

**Table 1-2.** Skier Days for Whitefish Mountain Resort and Blacktail Mountain Resort

<b>Year</b>	<b>Whitefish Mountain Resort</b>	<b>Blacktail Mountain</b>	<b>Total Visits Days</b>
1999	285,681	21,044	306,725
2000	254,922	27,705	282,627
2001	267,731	35,715	303,446
2002	235,018	30,887	265,905
2003	258,738	31,051	289,789
2004	213,409	19,191	232,600
2005	304,366	37,356	341,722
2006	260,278	40,215	300,493
2007	296,708	41,657	338,365

The 10 year average for the time period of 1999 to 2007 is 295,741 skier days.

## **Trails**

The Flathead National forest has approximately 2070 miles of trails. Table 3 shows trail mileage by winter activity. Table 4 shows trail mileage by designated wilderness area totaling 1,112 miles of trail located in designated wilderness. Table 3 below shows the motorized and non-motorized activities.

**Table 1-3. Winter Activity Trail Mileages**

Winter Activity (Non-wilderness Non- motorized)	Miles
Groomed cross country ski trail *	15.5 Blacktail Nordic Ski Area 11.9 Round Meadows Cross Country 14.0 Isaac Walton Cross Country Trail System 6.0 Glacier Wilderness Resort
Total	47.4

Winter Activity	Miles
Groomed Snowmobile**	29 Desert Mountain 26 Skyland Area 43 Swan Lake 6 Holland 45 Stillwater/Canyon Creek
Total	149

\*Data from Flathead NF Round Meadows and Blacktail Cross Country Ski Area Maps

\*\*Data from 2010 Flathead Area Groomed Snowmobile Trails Map

Stillwater, Canyon Creek, Desert Mountain, Swan Lake & Skyland Areas

November 2006, a Record of Decision was signed for the Flathead National Forest Winter Motorized Recreation Plan. There are 787,100 acres of snowmobile opportunities available to the public forest-wide. In addition to the trail mileages listed above, there are additional miles of non-motorized non-wilderness and wilderness trails that provide cross country and backcountry skiing and snowshoeing opportunities.

In 2000, the Regional Forester implemented a special order for Region One. This order generally prohibits cross country travel by motorized wheeled vehicles in the forest and grasslands administered by the USDA Forest Service in Montana, North Dakota and part of South Dakota.

On November 9, 2005, the Forest Service published a final travel management regulation, governing use of Off Highway Vehicles and other motor vehicles. Final directives were finalized and became effective January 7, 2009. The final rule and directives require individual national forests to designate those roads, trails and areas open to motorized vehicles on a Motor Vehicle Use Map.

The Spotted Bear Ranger District reviewed motorized travel routes and identified potential changes to the existing open motorized transportation system on the district. A final Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) was issued the fall of 2007 shortly after the end of the planning period.

**Table 1-4. Wilderness Trail Mileage**

Wilderness Area	Miles*
Bob Marshall Wilderness	782
Great Bear Wilderness	332
Mission Mountains Wilderness	40
Wilderness (non-motorized)	1,154

**Table 1-5.** Trail Designation and Miles

Trail Designation	Miles*	% of total
Wilderness (non-motorized)	1,154	52
Non-wilderness, non-motorized	664	30
Motorized - ATV	30	1
Motorized - single track	56.2	3
Groomed Winter Non-motorized	47.5	2
Groomed Winter Motorized	149	7
Ungroomed Winter Motorized	98	5
Total Miles	2198.7	

*\* Based on 1/10 Infra data adjusted by district and forest GIS input.*

Due to the forest currently working on travel management, the infrastructure trails data base is in the process of being updated.

Snowmobile mileages are taken from 2008 Over the Snow Vehicle Use Maps for Glacier View, Swan Lake, Tally Lake and Hungry Horse/Spotted Bear Districts.

As Motorized Vehicle Use Analysis described above is completed for the summer season on additional ranger districts on the Forest, these figures will be subject to change per the outcome of these analyses.

Table 5 above illustrates that 82 % of the trails on the Flathead National Forest are managed for non-motorized use. Seven percent of the trails are groomed for snowmobiling with 2% groomed for cross country skiing. Four percent of the Flathead trail system managed for summer motorized use, predominantly single track. In addition to the trail miles open to All Terrain Vehicles (ATV), opportunities exist on the Tally Lake Ranger District for ATV use on 600 miles of Forest roads that receive light vehicle use. 150 miles of these roads are open seasonally from 7/1-8/31. The remaining mileage is open year round. ATV opportunities exist on all open National Forest System Roads, if the ATV is street legal and the operator has a vehicle driver license.

## **Outfitter and Guide Services**

Outfitter and guide service play an important role in providing a wide array of recreation activities. They provide visitors seeking assistance, a chance to explore the national forest. The Flathead National Forest has about 40 outfitter and guide permits. The table below shows the number of outfitters, by 22 activity types, that provide services on the Flathead National Forest.

**Table 1-6.** Number of Outfitters by Activity Type on the Flathead National Forest

Activity Type	Number of outfitters
ATV tours	2
Backpacking	3
Mountain Biking	3
Bird Watching	5
Boating	16
Cattle Drives	1

Dog Sledding	1
Fishing	23
Hiking	11
Horse/Trail Rides	19
Ice Climbing	1
Llama Trips	1
Hunting	25
Packing with Horses	19
Photography	5
Rafting	13
Snow Shoeing	1
Snowmobiling	3
Touring Scenery	15
Total	136

The predominant services provided include hunting, fishing, packing with horses, horse trail rides, and boating and rafting on the Flathead Wild and Scenic River and Swan River.

### **Campground Use**

Some of our campgrounds are operated by a private business that has Forest Service campgrounds under a permit. On the Flathead NF, the campground concessionaire manages 8 campgrounds, 5 day-use sites and 5 group campsites. The Flathead National Forest also manages 3 full service campgrounds. The Forest manages an additional 17 campgrounds and trailheads that have limited services available i.e. no water or trash service. In addition, visitors can camp on national forest service lands outside of campgrounds for free.

**Table 1-7.** Percent Occupied for Concessionaire Operated Campgrounds on the Flathead NF

<b>Campground Name</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>
Swan Lake	47%	41%	51%	62%	74%	79%
Holland Lake	57%	41%	59%	85%	93%	78%
Emery Bay	31%	25%	37%	48%	63%	52%
Murray Bay	15%	11%	16%	25%	36%	36%
Lid Creek	23%	19%	20%	28%	37%	44%
Lost Johnny Point and Campground	54%	37%	41%	47%	54%	50%
Big Creek	33%	21%	25%	33%	40%	44%
Tally Lake	44%	53%	41%	69%	75%	50%

Percent occupancy is determined for each campground by:

(# of days sites are occupied (from daily use reports) divided by  
 (#of sites x # of days campground is open each season)

Data provided by the concessionaire in his annual end-of-year-report.

There has been a slight decrease in overnight campground use from 2006 to 2007 which can partially be attributed to fires and resultant campground closures at Tally and Swan Lake

Campgrounds during the summer of 2007. Day use figures have steadily increased from 2004 to 2006, with a decrease in 2007.

**Rental Cabins**

The Flathead Forest has 11 cabins available for rent on the National Reservation Service. These cabins offer a unique recreational experience and a glimpse into rustic life of the Forest Service. Five of the cabins are available year round and are accessible by car. Two cabins are closed during March, April and May and are accessible by car the rest of the year. Two lookout towers are available during the summer season June – October, with one tower accessible by car and the second a requiring a 1 mile hike from the trailhead. The two cabins available during the winter season Dec 1 – March 31 are accessible by hiking, cross county skiing, snowshoeing, or snowmobiling.

**Recommended Actions:**

Continue with the planning and implementation of the Motorized Vehicle Use maps on the Swan Lake, Tally Lake, and Glacier View/Hungry Horse Ranger Districts. Complete Outfitter Needs Assessment for the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex and the Flathead National Forest utilizing the Visitor Use Study conducted in the BMWC in 2004. Continue with implementation the new outfitter guide policy. Complete National Visitor Use Monitoring in 2010.